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AUTHOR Ashworth, Mary
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ABSTRACT

Classroom teachers are affected directly and indirectly by external forces: international, national, social, institutional, pedagogical, economic, commercial, professional, and religious. It is proposed that teachers make use of constructive forces and combat destructive ones by using organizational and individual resources to create change. Twenty axioms for effecting change in educational policy and procedures are outlined. (MSE)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"Fifth Business" in the Classroom

Mary Ashworth

We have a saying, "When the U.S.A. sneezes, Canada catches a cold," which is just a way of pointing out the interdependence between our two countries. A famous Canadian, Marshall McLuhan, looked wider and called our world "a global village," emphasizing the relationships that hold between world communities. But John Donne said it all years ago as he turned the spotlight on the individual: "No man is an island, Entire of itself." These statements remind us of the interdependence that exists between man and man, between man and community, and between communities. This same interdependence holds between the world outside the classroom and the classroom. Try as they may, classroom teachers cannot shut the world out of their classrooms. There are in our local, national and world societies a number of forces which affect classroom teachers directly and indirectly, no matter what age or ability level nor where in the world they are teaching.

I want to look first at some of these forces and their effect on classroom teachers, and then look briefly at ways in which these forces can be combatted if they are destructive and harnessed if they are constructive.

International Forces

An obscure archduke was murdered in a small town in Europe in 1914 and the world was plunged into war. A dictator came to power in Uganda and thousands of refugees were forced to flee. Oil was discovered in a small desert kingdom and world finances were turned topsy-turvey. We do not know what is happening right now in some part of the world we have never heard of that may affect our lives.

What events affect us as language teachers? Perhaps the unstable economy of some far distant country; or an unstable or unacceptable political regime; or the emigration or immigration policies of countries which export or import people; or the desire of a country to increase the technical knowledge of its young people; or the use to which a country puts education, including language learning—perhaps to advance the individual, perhaps to control him/her—and the kind of help that that country seeks from another country.

Mary Ashworth is an Associate Professor in the Language Education Department, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, specializing in E.S.L.. She is also the current Associate Chair of the Teacher Education Interest Section.

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How do these few items I have mentioned in the international sphere affect the ESL/EFL teacher? They affect:

a) who the students are—their source countries,
b) how many are permitted to enter the receiving country and therefore how many language teachers are needed,
c) whether the students are independent, financially secure, well educated or refugees with no money and an interrupted education,
d) whether the movement of people is planned and orderly or sudden and chaotic.

National Forces

Countries have different policies regarding assimilation or integration, regarding ethnocentricity or multiculturalism. Some countries accept newcomers as citizens-in-the-making; others see them as sojourners who must, in time, return to their own land.

Every country has its own political system, its own way of permitting change to be brought about—perhaps through party politics, perhaps through grass roots advocacy groups—or perhaps change is not allowed.

These factors affect:

a) the cultural content of ESL/EFL courses—is one culture represented or are many?
b) the flavour of textbooks—are they highly nationalistic or do they present a wider, international flavour?
c) the emphasis placed on citizenship training as a goal of the program,
d) the ways in which teachers can make changes that will benefit students.

Social Forces

How well does a society accept people from other cultures? Is racism overt or covert? The answer may well lie in the history of that particular society, for instance, in their response over the last one hundred years to culturally and linguistically different immigrants.

What is the status of teachers in the society? Does the community respect the teaching profession? Are some teachers more equal than others? Where do ESL/EFL teachers stand in the pecking order? Is the community prepared to spend tax dollars on the culturally and linguistically different learner? Will the community find jobs for these people or will it stand in the way of their vocational, social and educational aspirations?

These social forces affect:

a) teacher training,
b) the hiring of teachers,
c) support for programs,
d) curriculum,
e) the role of the teacher.

Institutional Forces

During the last few years we have heard about *institutional discrimination*. It exists. For instance, do all schools make it possible for non-English speaking children attending English medium schools to catch up in language use and in their general education to their peers, or are there subtly built-in barriers to their progress?

Some institutional administrators constrain teachers to such a degree that it is impossible for them to do a good job. Others see their role as servants of the students and their teachers.

Anyone who has worked in a large institution knows the interdepartmental rivalries which disrupt the environment; similar rivalries are found between institutions. When what is sought is either personal gain or the territorial imperative for its own sake, then competition can be damaging.

Finally, every institution has its own philosophy and goals—sometimes clearly stated, sometimes not—and ESL/EFL must fall or flourish within these goals.

Institutional forces affect:

a) the goals of the ESL/EFL program,
b) the design, length and quality of the program,
c) the hiring of teachers and teacher trainers,
d) the climate within which the program operates.

Pedagogical Forces

Many items could be listed under this heading; let me mention a few. There is the input from related disciplines such as linguistics, sociology and psychology as well as from education. There is research, both good and bad research, research into important matters and research into trivia, and there are many gaps in research. There is the quality of teacher training, both pre-service and in-service; the relationship of ESL/EFL to the rest of education; and the relationship of language learning to the learner's further education and cultural adjustment. Each of these items can be expanded and others added to the list, but time is short.

How do these pedagogical forces affect classroom teachers? They affect:

a) the quality of classroom teaching,
b) the approaches, methods and techniques used,
c) the curriculum—its construction, its purpose,
d) the textbooks used,
e) the kinds of programs mounted by an institution—both ESL/EFL programs and support services such as counselling.

Economic Forces

We have booms and busts, periods of expansion and recession. They may occur in our own country, or we may feel the effects of another country's growth or regression.

Economics affects the willingness of citizens to pay taxes to support community education programs.

Economic forces affect:

a) funding, which in turn affects whether or not there is an ESL/EFL program, which affects the hiring and firing of teachers,
b) class size,
c) amount and quality of materials available,
d) society's attitude towards immigrants. (When there is a booming economy, immigrants are welcome because labour is needed. But a recession brings unemployment, and immigrants are often scapegoated for the failure of society to better order its economy. The result may be a rise in racism and increased tension in society, in the institution, and in the classroom.)

Commercial Forces

I remember the days when there was virtually only one Canadian ESL textbook used across Canada: Carson Martin's *An Introduction to Canadian English*. There was, in addition, a limited amount of material from the U.S.A. and the U.K. If you have visited the publishers' display at this Convention, you have seen and perhaps tasted the banquet of books and other aids now on sale. But publishers have to make a profit if they are to stay in business; they can take some risks, but not enough to cripple themselves. During the last few years in Canada, some ministries and departments of education have stopped adopting *one* text for all students in the province; instead, they now recommend five or six possible texts leaving it to school districts to make the choice. Large bulk orders are therefore not made as frequently, which naturally affects the publishing business.

The commercial forces in our society can affect:

a) the supply of commercial texts, games, hardware and software available to teachers,
b) the content of the materials purchased by teachers,
c) the approaches and methods teachers will use, influenced as they will be by the materials they purchase.

I have not touched on other forces such as the professional force (teachers' organizations, for example), or the religious force, and you may well think of other forces which have a particular effect on you.

Teachers' Response to these Forces

Do teachers have a responsibility to harness those forces which are beneficial to their students and to combat those forces which are harmful to their students? I think they do. Then how can they do it? Through organizations and through individuals.

There are both international and national organizations. Which is TESOL? I sense it is both. Some of its affiliates lie outside the U.S.A.; therefore, there must exist what I think of as TESOL International. Yet from time to time my affiliate here in Canada gets letters asking us to write to our congressman—we don't have one! That sounds like TESOL U.S.A.! Perhaps to be really effective, nationally in the U.S.A. and internationally, TESOL has to make a clear distinction between its two parts so that we know when TESOL USA is speaking and when TESOL International is speaking. Both voices need to be heard, but distinctly, not blurred.

TESL Canada has put out an excellent position paper dealing with ESL for

adults. It spoke with a national voice about a national concern. I would like to ask TESL Canada to establish a position on (1) the education of non-English speaking children across Canada and (2) teacher training in ESL. I know that funding for projects like this is a problem but it is amazing how governments under pressure can find money.

Next, let us consider the role of the individual. It takes time and effort so to control the forces in our respective societies that they work for the benefit of our students. It is often tiresome and frustrating work, but the rewards are immense: new programs are mounted, quality improves, and better opportunities for advancement are open to non-English-speaking students.

In 1981 I wrote an article entitled "Twenty Axioms For Making Changes in Educational Policies and Procedures" which was published in the fall issue of *TESL Talk*. The following are my twenty axioms, written, of course, for a Canadian audience, but applicable, I think, to some degree in other countries:

1. *Be quite clear in your own mind what the problems are and what needs to be done.* If you are not clear in your own mind what the heart of the problem is and what needs to be done about it, you will never convince anyone that you are anything more than a perennial grumbler! (The *you* addressed here and throughout these axioms is either (1) the individual teacher seeking to rectify a poor situation adversely affecting his/her own class and brought about by an unsound policy or practice within a single institution, or (2) a local, provincial or federal organization trying to change an unsound policy or practice initiated or tolerated by government or (3) both.)
2. *Collect the facts and figures you need to prove you have a case.* The phrase *a lot of people* does not carry nearly as much weight as *fifty* or *five thousand* or whatever number fits the situation. Figures are often available if you search long enough and ask enough questions of enough people. If figures are not available then perhaps this *fact* that no one has cared enough to find out, for example, how many preschool ESL children are not getting adequate or appropriate language help in day care centres, needs to be made public to show up the lack of concern for those who cannot help themselves. Facts, or the established absence of facts, give strength to a brief.
3. *Decide on your four or five major priorities—then pick the one you think you can be reasonably sure of completing successfully and get on with it quickly.* Nothing succeeds like success. When you have been successful once, people will start to take notice of you. The news will spread that you don't just talk—you act! Once you have established a positive reputation, you can get going on some of the long term, and perhaps more important, items on your priority list.
4. *Gather a few like-minded people around you.* Your collective enthusiasm will attract others. Many successful movements of the past, whether social, political or religious, were rooted in the beliefs and actions of a mere handful of people who refused to be defeated.
5. *Get to know some government officials, municipal, provincial and federal, on a personal basis.* There are many sincere and dedicated civil servants who experience the same joys and the same frustrations as we in the field do

in trying to change the world. When you know them, they will give you good counsel and win your respect.

6. *Take an active part in local politics.* You don't have to run for office, but know what is going on in your local community. Be an informed voter and be ready to inform others. Serve on a community-based committee and become known.
7. *Encourage outsiders to meet your students and to see what goes on in your classroom.* Don't let ESL/EFL become a *mystery cult* in your institution. School administrators and other teachers, as well as members of the community, need to see for themselves what you are talking about when you say you want to make changes.
8. *Support your organization and be prepared to give it some time and to serve on a committee.* The energy which fuels an organization comes from the individual members. If your organization has not done as much as you think it should have done, perhaps it is just short of member-energy. Decide how much time you can give and when you can give it—then phone the president!
9. *But remember that the individual is just as important as an organization—both have a role to play in making changes.* Not everyone is an *organization person.* Some are loners and work better on their own. Any time you feel that an individual in today's complex world is powerless, remember Terry Fox. (Terry Fox lost a leg to cancer. He ran halfway across Canada and raised over twenty million dollars for cancer research before the disease killed him.)
10. *Make your organization truly representative—don't let cliques develop.* A good mixture of people who represent different geographical regions, different types of institutions and different levels of instruction will make the pinpointing of problems common to all much easier, allowing battle to be enjoined on a number of fronts simultaneously.
11. *Advertise your organization and its cause.* Get on the media. Send out brochures. Remember that *out of sight* does mean *out of mind.*
12. *Join hands with organizations in the local community or in the province that have similar interests.* A good communications network can ensure that organizations work in support of each other and not at cross-purposes.
13. *Join hands also with national organizations.* TESL Canada, for example, is our national ESL organization comprising the provincial ESL associations and representatives from the unorganized regions. Be ready to speak to the federal government with a strong national voice and to the provincial government with a strong provincial voice.
14. *Keep personally well informed on what is happening in the field locally, provincially, nationally and internationally; and as an organization keep your members well informed.* Every ESL/EFL teacher is a public affairs representative for ESL/EFL and must be ready to speak knowledgeably about the concerns and achievements in the field.
15. *Make sure you know what concerns come under the federal government and what come under the provincial government so that you know who to ask for what.* Kicking the football back and forth is an old game played by provincial and federal politicians. Don't give them an excuse for a game by taking a request to the wrong group. But if they do play football with you,

make sure there is a crowd (the public) watching. There is nothing like a wide-awake audience for keeping the players honest. After all, the audience pays the players' salaries!

16. *Find a politician in power and another in opposition who seem to have some interest in your cause and cultivate them.* Send them information, invite them to meet you, get on first-name terms with someone in the constituency office, and then get to work on them!
17. *Show these politicians what benefits they will reap from supporting your cause—votes? publicity?* They are busy people and need some pay-off for the time they give you.
18. *Ask questions* before *making accusations.* You may be wrong! Asking a few simple but direct questions is an important component in the process of making changes.
19. *Be professional in fact not in fiction.* That is, be properly trained, if possible in connection with a university. Engage in classroom action research. Write articles dealing with your own particular expertise. Learn from the ever-increasing body of knowledge about ESL/EFL and add to it.
20. *Be prepared to be hurt.* If you want to make changes in society, you must make yourself vulnerable to personal attack. But remember—the hurt you will feel will probably be nothing compared to the hurt presently felt by those for whom change is so desperately needed.

Well, there it is. There are forces out there that can help and hinder us all in our work. We can and must control, combat and harness them—and where there's a will there's a way!

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